



High School Exit Examination

Questions and Answers for Administrators

What is the High School Exit Examination (HSEE)?

State law (Senate Bill 2), passed last spring, authorized the development of the High School Exit Examination that students in California public schools will have to pass to receive a high school diploma, beginning with the graduating class of 2004.

What is the purpose of the HSEE?

The purpose of the HSEE is to improve student achievement in high school. It is also to help ensure that students who graduate from high school can demonstrate competency in the content standards for reading, writing, and mathematics, adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE).

Who will have to take the HSEE?

Beginning in 2000-2001, students in grade 9 may, but will not be required to, take the exam. Beginning in 2001-02, students in grade 10 will have to take the examination. Students in the graduating class of 2004 will have to pass all sections of the HSEE to receive a diploma.

Why will students take the high school exit examination in grade 10?

Students must have many opportunities to meet the HSEE requirement for a high school diploma and to receive appropriate instruction on the standards covered by the test. Requiring the exam to be taken for the first time in grade 10 provides the opportunity for students who are unsuccessful to receive additional instruction and to retake the exam.

Will English language learners (ELLs) have to take the HSEE?

If a school district determines that a student does not possess sufficient English language skills to be assessed, the district may defer the requirement that the student pass the HSEE for a period of up to 24 calendar months from enrollment in the California public school system until the student has completed six months of instruction in reading, writing, and comprehension in the English language. English language learners must pass the exit examination in English to receive a high school diploma.

Will special education students have to take the HSEE?

Yes. Special education students cannot receive their high school graduation diploma without passing the HSEE. The HSEE may be administered with appropriate accommodations as required in each student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP). All special education students are required to take the HSEE unless the student's IEP does not lead to a high school diploma.

Will transfer students have to take the HSEE?

Yes. The law states that, beginning in 2004, all students will have to pass the HSEE to receive a diploma of graduation.

When must parents and students be notified about the HSEE?

Beginning with the 2000-01 school year and each school year thereafter, districts will be required to send notification about the HSEE to parents and students at the beginning of the first semester or quarter of the regular school term. That notice must go to all students in grade 9 or higher; however, districts may wish to notify parents and students in grades 7 and 8 as well.

What should the notice include?

The authorizing law says that notice should include at a minimum:

- date of the examination.
- requirements for passing the examination.
- consequences of not passing the examination.
- passing the examination as a condition of graduation.

What happens if a student is not notified?

The examination may not be administered to a student who does not receive adequate notice.

What if parents do not want their students tested?

All students will be required to pass the examination to get a high school diploma from a California public school.

**How can schools help their students do better on the HSEE?**

Local districts are to use existing resources such as class size reduction, staff development programs, after school programs, and summer school programs to provide supplemental instruction to help all students succeed.

Will there be a pilot or field test of the test questions before the HSEE is administered to students in the spring of 2001?

Yes. Field testing for the HSEE will occur from May 15 through May 24, 2000 and again in the fall of 2000. The purpose of this field testing is to ensure that the test questions and test scores are of the highest technical quality possible and the decisions made using the HSEE results can be fully supported.

How was the content determined for the high school exit examination?

The HSEE Panel reviewed the standards in English-language arts and mathematics and recommended standards they felt were essential for students to master for graduation from high school. Additionally, the Governor addressed the SBE stating that the English-language arts examination should assess the standards through grade 10 and include a writing sample. He also stated that the HSEE should include an assessment of mathematics through first-year algebra.

What will the reading and writing HSEE field test cover?

The HSEE field test in reading and writing addresses SBE-adopted standards through grade 10. The field test will consist of multiple-choice questions and two written essays. The reading portion of the test is to cover vocabulary, informational reading, and literary reading. This section will include 50% literary texts and 50% informational texts. The texts will be grade appropriate and accessible to students in grade 10 who perform at a basic level.

The writing portion will cover writing strategies, applications, and conventions. The field test will also have one written response to literature and one written response not related to a reading text.

What will the mathematics HSEE field test cover?

The HSEE field test in mathematics addresses the SBE-adopted standards through algebra I. The mathematics test will include statistics, data analysis and probability, number sense, measurement and geometry, mathematical reasoning, and algebra. High school graduates should also demonstrate a strong foundation in arithmetic, including work with decimals, fractions, and percents. The field test will consist of all multiple-choice items.

How was it determined that the content of mathematics through algebra I be tested?

The mathematics standards at grades 8 through 12 are organized by discipline rather than by grade level. These standards indicate that all students are expected to master algebra I, geometry, algebra II, and probability and statistics by the end of grade 12. Many schools and districts are just beginning to implement the standards. It was recommended that the initial examination include all of mathematics through algebra I and that more advanced geometry, algebra II, and probability and statistics may be added in future years.

How will districts and schools be selected to participate in these HSEE field tests?

The districts and schools that will be asked to participate in the field tests will be selected by the HSEE development contractor, American Institutes for Research (AIR). The selection of districts will be from a stratified random sample in order to reflect both different levels of academic achievement and the diversity of California's student population. This sampling is necessary to provide the most accurate and reliable information about student responses to the test questions and to be certain that the HSEE reflects all of California's schools and students. This type of scientific sampling means that all districts and schools that volunteer to participate in the field test may not be asked to participate; only schools selected for the sample will participate in this spring's field test. In the event that schools in your district have been selected to be a part of the field test sample, the contractor, AIR, or their sub-contractor, the San Joaquin County Office of Education, will contact you. If your school or district has volunteered, please know that schools may be needed for other activities related to the HSEE.

**When will the HSEE be finalized?**

The test content and format of the HSEE must be adopted by the State Board of Education in October 2000 before the first test is given in spring 2001.

How can students prepare for the HSEE?

It will be important that students take classes that include instruction in state content standards for English/language arts and math. Students will need to use their knowledge of the content identified for the test.

What if my district doesn't use the same standards as the content standards adopted by the State Board?

Districts are responsible for preparing students to pass the HSEE. Districts will need to examine the content standards designated for the HSEE and ensure that their students have the opportunity to achieve those standards.

What is my responsibility as an administrator?

Administrators need to ensure that teachers are providing students with the content described in the state mathematics and language arts standards, that supplemental instruction is being provided for students who have not demonstrated sufficient progress towards passing the HSEE, and that students and parents are receiving adequate notice about the HSEE.

Students have not demonstrated sufficient progress if they have received low scores on the STAR standards-based assessments in grades 7, 8, and/or 9 or if they have taken but not passed the HSEE (see Education Code section 37252(a)(1)(2)).

Will students and parents be able to see the HSEE before the test is administered?

Actual test questions will be seen only by the students when they take the examination. This security measure will ensure that the examination is fair for all students. A test guide will be developed to provide sample test questions and other information.

What if a student is absent on testing days?

The HSEE will be administered only on the examination or makeup days designated each year by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

How and when will parents get their student's test results?

Test results must be returned to students within eight weeks of administration. Specific details about the reporting process to students and parents have not yet been finalized.

What will happen if a student doesn't pass the HSEE?

Students will be able to retake the examination until all the portions are passed, and they will retake only those portions not previously passed. Districts must provide supplemental instruction aligned to the state content standards to assist students who do not pass the test. They will also provide summer school programs for students who need additional assistance. This will include summer school for seniors who do not pass the exam.

Will there be alternatives to the HSEE?

The law authorizing the HSEE states that after initial administrations of the exit examination, the State Board of Education, in consultation with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, shall study the appropriateness of other criteria by which high school students may demonstrate their competency and receive a high school diploma.

If a student doesn't pass the HSEE, will that student be given a certificate of completion?

This is a local decision. School districts may choose to provide a certificate of completion to students not passing the examination.

Will districts still be required to give the minimum proficiency exams currently in place?

For many years, districts have been required to adopt standards of proficiency in basic skills, and students have been required to achieve mastery of these skills as a condition of receiving a high school diploma. The Education Code no longer requires locally-developed proficiency exams. A school district may continue to require students to pass proficiency examinations approved by the district governing board as a condition for graduation.

Additional information about the HSEE is posted on the California Department of Education website at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cilbranch/sca/hsee/hsee.html> (Internet).